

Remarks at a Meeting on Cybersecurity

January 31, 2017

The President. Thank you, everybody. Thank you, everybody, for being here. We appreciate it. Today I'm convening this meeting to follow through on my promise to secure crucial infrastructure and the networks—that we've been talking so much about over the last period of time—of the Federal Government against cyber threats.

I will hold my Cabinet Secretaries and agency heads accountable—totally accountable—for the cybersecurity of their organization, of which we probably don't have as much, certainly not as much as we should have. We will defend and protect Federal networks and data. We operate these networks on behalf of the American people, and they are very important and very sacred. We will empower these agencies to modernize their IT systems for better security and other reasons.

We will protect our critical infrastructure such as power plants and electrical grids. The electrical grid problem is a problem, but we'll have it solved relatively soon. We must work with private sector—the private sector is way ahead of Government in this case—to ensure that owners and operators of critical infrastructure have the support they need from the Federal Government to defend against cyber threats.

Now, I think a pretty good example of this was, despite having spent hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars—more money than we did—the Democratic National Committee was hacked successfully, very successfully, and terribly, frankly. And the Republican National Committee was not hacked, meaning it was hacked, but they failed. All right? It was reported, I believe, by Reince and other people that it was hacked, but we had a very strong defense system against hacking.

So despite spending a lot less money than the Democrats and, in all fairness, winning—people don't say that—we spent a lot less money, Admiral, and we won. That's good, right? Isn't that a good thing, when you can spend less and win?

National Security Agency Director Michael S. Rogers. Yes, sir.

The President. But we were also very successful in our defense against hacking.

We're going to make sure that cybersecurity is central to both our military and the ships, planes, and tanks built by great Americans for our great American military. And our military will become stronger and stronger as we go along.

I just met with General Mattis, and he's doing a great job. We're really happy with him and everybody. You probably saw General Kelly; he was spectacular today on his press conference, and we appreciate everything he said.

With that, I want to introduce Rudy Giuliani, and he's going to be working with Jared Kushner and with Tom Bossert, who are also here. And Rudy is very much of an expert on cybersecurity. It's been a very important thing to him and to what he does. And maybe I'll ask Rudy to say a few words.

Where is Rudy?

Former Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani of New York City. Well, thanks. Thank you very, very much, Mr. President. And first of all, congratulations on what is, in fact, a historic start of an administration. I've never seen so much done in so short a period of time than ever. I was in the early part of the Reagan administration; we used to sit in this room every Thursday, and I remember how fast they got off to a start, and you're about three times ahead of them. I don't remember the Roosevelt thousand days, but I think you may be ahead of him. And you're doing it without a Cabinet, with three, four members.

The President. It would help if the Democrats approved my Cabinet, I will say. [Laughter]

Mr. Giuliani. So congratulations. And what you've been doing is keeping your promises, and this is one of your promises. One of your promises was to shore up our country because one of the dangers we face—national security and crime—is cybersecurity. And a large part of our country, unlike other countries, is made up of the private sector. And the private sector is wide open to hacking. And sometimes, by hacking the private sector, you can get into Government.

So we can't do this separately, and you were wise enough to decide that we should have a Council where we can bring in the private sector, they can explain to you the problems they have, they can explain to the administration the solutions they have, which, in some cases, may be better than the Government; in some cases they may not be as good as the Government. Plus, we can search around the world, including in countries like Israel and places where they're doing a lot of advanced cybersecurity analysis; we can look for long-term solutions.

So here, you're addressing not only a national security problem, but you're addressing the fastest growing form of crime in America, which is cyber theft. It's growing faster than any other crime.

And finally, by speaking out on this and holding regular meetings on it, you're using the bully pulpit of the Presidency to get the private sector to wake up. Some of the private sector has awakened to the fact that they have to do more about cybersecurity, but part of it hasn't. And as President, you are in a unique position to get the private sector to realize that they have to pitch in and help the Government.

And I'll work very closely with Jared and with Tom and Sebastian Gorka and all the people that you have that are working on this. And we'll take our priorities from you. If what you—if first you want to do is look at the grid, we'll bring in all the private grid companies and solution companies. If you want to look at financial institutions, we'll do financial institutions. If you want to look at hospitals, we'll bring in hospitals.

But we'll let you set the priorities so we can have a very, very close working relationships. And congratulations on fulfilling another one of your campaign promises.

The President. Well, thank you very much, Rudy. I appreciate it. And I know you're going to do a great job. And you've formed a Committee. And we're going to go into great detail, and we'll have it up and running. And we'll be doing something very special in many ways.

I want to just thank Senator Dan Coats. Thank you very much for being here, Senator. Would you have anything to say about cyber?

Director of National Intelligence—designate Daniel R. Coats. Clearly, it's risen to a top priority because of the impact that it can have. My job, if confirmed—and I'm not confirmed yet—

The President. I have a feeling you'll make it.

Director-designate Coats. Well, I hope so. [*Laughter*] My job is to make sure the intelligence community provides every bit of intelligence that they can so that the policies that can be affected are the right policies to deal with this. I think this is an enormous challenge, but one that is a significant threat to our country and something that needs to be—we have to get after this right away.

The President. Well, I want to thank you for your service and thank you for everything you've done, even over the last week. Your knowledge is amazing, and everybody has great respect. So thank you very much.

Director-designate Coats. Don't oversell your man. [*Laughter*]

The President. He thought he was going to leave after many years in the Senate and have a nice, peaceful life, when I called him—"Dan, how about going a little bit longer?" And we really do appreciate it. Thank you very much.

And, Admiral, thank you very much, Mike, for being here. Would you have anything to say about cyber?

Director Rogers. Other than, as Mr. Giuliani indicated, I believe the key here is going to be partnerships between the private sector and the Government; it's our ability to bring together the capabilities of both, that's the sweet spot.

The President. Good. Well, we'll do that. And as you know, John Kelly just gave a very long news conference and a very, very good one and effective one. And while he's warmed up—[*laughter*—you might as well go for another 1 minute or 2 minutes.

Secretary of Homeland Security John F. Kelly. I have a lot of things to say about cyber, but I think I'll just learn at the feet of the wise men here, sir.

The President. Going to have a lot to do with the border and with, really, I mean, if you think about it, a lot to do with what you're doing. It's going to be very important.

Well, thank you all very much. And we're going to have a meeting, and we're going to get it going. Thank you, gentlemen.

Q. Are you going to get your Supreme Court nominee through, Mr. President?

Q. Any clue on who you'll choose?

Mr. Giuliani. I'd like to point out—one second. I'd just like to point out one person—General Keith Alexander——

The President. Hold up, one second, Rudy was just saying one thing.

Mr. Giuliani. General Keith Alexander is probably the person who knows the most about cybersecurity of anyone that I know.

The President. Good.

Mr. Giuliani. And he, I hope, will play a very, very big role in this.

Former National Security Agency Director Keith B. Alexander. We're looking forward to supporting you, Mr. President, and you——

Mr. Giuliani. This man is a tremendous resource.

The President. Thank you. That's great. Thank you, General. That's very nice. And we'll see you in a little while; we'll be announcing a Supreme Court Justice who I think everybody is going to be very, very impressed with. So we'll see you at about 8 o'clock.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:21 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to White House Chief of Staff Reinhold R. "Reince" Priebus, in his former capacity as chairman of the Republican National Committee; Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis; Secretary of Homeland Security John F. Kelly; White House Senior Adviser Jared C. Kushner; and Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Thomas P. Bossert. Mr. Giuliani referred to Deputy Assistant to the President Sebastian L. Gorka. The transcript, prepared for immediate release by the Office of the Press Secretary, was received by the Office of the Federal Register on July 27.

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